

Hungarian heritage in the United States:

# From the George Washington Awards Dinner to the Hungarian Festival

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*The former official concept of the „melting pot” in the United States has changed to the appreciation of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity in recent years. One of the centers of Hungarian cultural heritage is the American Hungarian Foundation – or the Hungarian Heritage Center including a Museum, Library and Archives in New Brunswick, NJ. The Hungarian-American Fulbright Commission (Budapest), the AHF (New Brunswick, NJ) and the National Széchényi Library (Budapest) jointly fund a grant each year to „support the exploration, cataloguing and preservation of the books and archival material held by the Library and Archives of the Foundation”. This is where I spent my research grant. Although the balance between assimilation and keeping one’s national identity is delicate, the spirit and heritage is still preserved and carried on by dedicated individuals, as well as non-profit organizations.*

## 1. Introduction

According to fairly recent census data 1,398,724 Hungarians lived in the United States in 2000 (source: Hungarian Reformed Federation of America at <http://www.hrfa.org>). The state of New Jersey was the 5th on this list with 115,615. I was amazed to learn how many religious, cultural, civic and educational organizations exist in New Brunswick, New Jersey alone. Somerset Street used to be the Hungarian quarter, and it's still lined with Hungarian flags, monuments and signs in Hungarian: in addition to the Hungarian Heritage Center (Image 1.), or popularly known as the Hungarian Museum, the Magyar Reformed Church, the St. Ladislaus Catholic Church, the Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Hungarian American Athletic Club, the Széchenyi Hungarian Community School and Kindergarten, the Hungarian Scout Home, two butcher's shops, and two Magyar Bank offices can be found in the neighborhood. There's even a Kossuth Street and Kossuth Park nearby. Hungarian language, literature, history and culture can be studied as a minor at the Department of German, Russian and East European Languages and Literatures at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey (<http://seell.rutgers.edu/Main%20Pages/Hungarian.html#Anchor-20697>). The Institute for Hungarian Studies, one of the centers within the Department „supports an undergraduate curriculum in Hungarian Studies, holds a public lecture series..., and assists the development of Hungarian book, journal, record and document collections in all Rutgers and affiliate libraries” among other things (its rather outdated homepage is available at <http://hi.rutgers.edu/about.html>). Organizations such as the Hungarian Alumni Association (Magyar Öregdiák Szövetség – Bessenyei György Kör), Bolyai Lecture Series on Arts and Sciences, Hungarian Civic Association of New Brunswick, Vers Hangja Irodalmi Kör – just to name a few – make sure that the next generations of American Hungarians learn about their language, literature, history, culture and help preserve their heritage through lectures, exhibitions, poetry readings, making traditional dishes, singing and dancing, etc.

My host institution was the American Hungarian Foundation (AHF) in New Brunswick, NJ for 7 months. „Founded in 1955, the Foundation's ongoing mission is to communicate the story of American Hungarians through the Hungarian Heritage Center, which is the only facility of its type in the United States. The traditions and contributions of American Hungarians are documented and conserved as important collections and shared with the general public in the Foundation's Museum, Library and Archives. The Foundation's location in the Northeast region of the United States places it not only in a historically important area for American Hungarians, but is also in close reach of nearly forty percent of the current American Hungarian population. Because the role

of Hungarians in this country is a significant ingredient in the fabric of American history, the Foundation is dedicated to preserving and enriching the Hungarian heritage in the United States.” – says the opening page of the recently redesigned website.

## 2. Work experience

As a Fulbright scholar my original aim was to find, organize and share primary resources about the Hungarian immigrants to the USA in the Library and Archives of the American Hungarian Foundation, New Brunswick, NJ. The Foundation is a remarkable place dedicated to collect and display Hungarian artifacts, printed and archival material donated to the AHF for more than five decades. Professor August J. Molnar, i.e. Molnár Ágoston has been the founder, the president, the fund-raiser, the missionary and driving force of the Foundation.

I worked closely with Margaret Papai (whose ex-husband was Hungarian and learnt Hungarian herself), the librarian and archivist first of all to select the most valuable and significant archival collection for cataloging. Our choice was the Bethlen Collection, i.e. the Archives of the Bethlen Home, formally called Bethlen Museum and Archives in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. The collection „includes administrative records of the Bethlen Home, official documents donated by Protestant churches and various religious, fraternal, political and cultural organizations. These materials include registers, ledgers, budgets, administrative files, annual reports, minutes, correspondence, circulars, official programs of festive occasions, conventions and other events, orders of worship, official publications, project plans, documents of public relations and lobbying activities, constitutions and by-laws and photographs.” It contains primary and secondary sources pertaining to Hungarian immigration and ethnic life in the United States; Hungarian-American historical and cultural relations; Hungarian immigrant life of the diaspora; and the affairs of Hungary. It is approximately 1,200 cubic feet in size, arranged in 1369 containers. My main job was to use an open source software called Archivists' Toolkit (AT) to catalog the Finding Aid for the Bethlen Collection, compiled by previous Fulbright scholars Ilona Kovács and András Csillag. The Archivists' Toolkit has been originally developed the University of California-San Diego (UCSD) Libraries and New York University (NYU) Libraries, together with the Five Colleges Libraries (Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, Smith, and University of Massachusetts Amherst) and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation since 2004, for processing and managing archival information in a standardized way, with the input of the 17 participating archival repositories. The Mellon Foundation extended the

initial funding for 2 more years in 2007, including more institutions both as partners in development and as users of the application. A list of self-identifying AT users in the United States and overseas with the name and URL of the repository and contact information is available at <http://archiviststoolkit.org/support/ListofATUsers>.

## 2.1. Functionality

Similarly to an integrated library system, the Archivists' Toolkit integrates a broad range of archival functions – it's a consistent tool for recording accessions, tracking sources and donors, managing name and subject authority terms, describing digital objects and archival collections, storing location information, all necessary ingredients of an archival management system. In addition, different output formats, including EAD (Encoded Archival Description) encoded finding aids and METS (Metadata Encoding and Transmission Standard) records can be produced or exported from it. What I liked about it was that the client interface was simple and easy enough to use, more than one staff members could have access to the same database with different permission levels at the same time. Although several reports can be created in a number of formats, such as a cumulative list of acquired accessions, a list of cataloged accessions, or an accession container list, Kiffany Francis reminds us that AT is not capable of creating a public Web interface for the general public to search. She suggests an application called Archon, developed by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, for making EAD finding aids available for searching through the Web in her July 2007 article. The next phase is in fact a project under way to integrate AT and Archon in the near future.

## 2.2. Workflow

Since the application integrates key procedures and functions, data entered once can be accessed and used by all the users. A repository record is necessary to give basic identifying information about the repository and to establish the formula for accession numbers and resource identifiers. The administration function also tracks the creation and last update of each record. The whole accession transaction is represented in the accession record: time and source of accession, preliminary description and condition of the resource, information about the intellectual rights and usage restrictions, and the existence of acquisition agreements or acknowledgment letters. Currently there are 173 resources registered in the AHF Archives collection. The resource is then described in detail in the resource record. This is the largest part of the application, which supports the single and multilevel description(s) of archival resources. Before my main project with the Bethlen Collection (ARCH/1), I started with a couple of smaller donations: Joseph St. Clair's Donation ARCH/60,

Stephen and Michael H. Gye's Donation ARCH/227, as a warm-up training. The hierarchical arrangement allowed keeping the structure of resource-series-subseries-group-file-document on the one hand, and subordinate or parallel relations could be created between the records. I found it neat to call these relations parent, child and sibling. Thus I could follow the structure of the original Finding Aid, creating and keeping the hierarchy, as shown in Image 2.

The original order of the documents within the series, based on tradition, was kept during cataloging. However, content analysis of the archival collection required some rearrangements, according to the types and topics of the documents: 1. church records, including synods and classes; 2. official records on institutions and organizations; 3. papers and collections of individuals; 4. documents arranged by subjects; and 5. miscellanea. The Bethlen Collection contains the documents of circa 140 denominations, 14 organizations and 71 individuals, 4 subject areas, namely Culture, Hungarian History, Human rights: Transylvania, Czechoslovakia, and Theology, and miscellaneous papers such as clippings, immigration files, private letters, passports, certificates, saving books, etc. Different descriptive notes were used as a standardized way to describe the History/Biography, Scope and Contents, Language of Material, Conditions Governing Access, Custodial History (for Provenance), Bibliography (for Source), etc.

## 2.3. Indexes: Names & Subjects

A key – and challenging – element in the application for me was establishing names and subjects for the descriptions, which practically meant creating searchable indexes. These authorized, or qualified, terms could be linked both to accession and description records. Name records can be created for persons, families, or organizations to indicate the creator, donor, or the subject of the material (file, resource, collection). Non-established forms of the name and related names (references) can also be linked to the names, the source of the established form (Library of Congress Name Authorities or local) can be given, and contact information for the person or organization can also be added with the successive interactions performed.

Since most of the names had Hungarian origin, due to the nature of the material, I used specific who's whos, biographical encyclopedias and online databases to create the authorized headings, which were all related to the immigration and lives of American Hungarians, including Nagy Csaba: A magyar emigráns irodalom lexikona (2000), Hungarians in America. A biographical directory of professionals of Hungarian origin in the Americas (1971), Hungarika Névkataszter, Hungarica Biographical Register (temporarily the service is not available online), and Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon 1000-1990, available in print and also online at <http://mek.oszk.hu/00300/00355/html/index.html>. I always indicated the source(s) I used in the name records.

For search and retrieval purposes it's essential to determine the topic(s) of the individual documents or groups of documents. It seemed evitable to add place names to the subject index, making the documents from or about the same place available more easily. The subject record contains not only the term itself, but the type of subject term – topical, geographic, genre – can also be selected, as well as the authority source – Art & Architecture Thesaurus, Library of Congress Subject Headings, or local – can be added. I used local and LoC subject headings for content description.

At the end of October 2008 there were 2669 names and 1222 subjects altogether in the AHF archival database. The AT Release 1.1.8, used at AHF during my research grant, could list the total entries, and not the names and subjects of a particular resource record. Hopefully this would be solved in a future version.

## **2.4. Summary**

I learned a great deal about the management of archives; accessioning and describing archival materials; establishing names and subjects associated with archival materials, including the names of donors; managing locations for the materials during this task. The database is currently available locally at the AHF Library, and easily searchable by creators, donors, subjects, place names. The development team for AT was asked to look at the exported data, so that the archival collection could be published and consulted by researchers on the World Wide Web.

## **2.5. Extra duties**

My secondary activity was to catalog the outstanding sound recordings collection of the Library in IRIS, the Rutgers University Libraries' Online Catalog. From classical to folk music, from lyrical to Gypsy music, from folk dance to Christmas carols by Hungarian composers and/or performed by Hungarian musicians, I managed to copy catalog 189 LPs, and made 119 original bibliographic records, supplemented with Library of Congress Subject Headings. In addition to sound recordings I also cataloged 48 books, with classification and topical description. I had access to the latest version of WorkFlows, the cataloging module of IRIS, as well as a number of other national (Library of Congress) and multi-library (WorldCat - OCLC) catalogs.

I was also involved in preparing for a major exhibition called *Magyar grafika: Hungarian posters, advertising & ephemera* (Image 3., 4.), together with the Museum curator, Patricia L. Fazekas. In addition to translating the brochure for the exhibition, originally written by a Hungarian museum curator, I made the translation of several press releases and public service announcements (PSA) during my entire stay.

## **3. Events**

To support its main mission, AHF established awards „to honor persons whose eminent contributions are in the broad field of human knowledge, the arts, commerce, industry, the sciences, and for understanding among men and nations”, which are presented at traditional special events such as the George Washington Awards Dinner in November, and the Carousel Ball in April or May. These events also serve as fund-raising benefits.

The 45th George Washington Awards Dinner took place in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City on November 14, 2007. The George Washington Laureates for 2007 were Thomas Peterffy, for his role in adopting electronic trading at U.S. exchanges, and Barry Farber, a radio talk show host, for his dedication to the cause of a democratic free Hungary in 1956 and for sharing the Hungarian cultural heritage.

I also attended the 45th Carousel Ball on May 17, 2008. The Abraham Lincoln Award was presented to Béla and Márta Károlyi, gymnastics coaches for Olympic and World champions Nadia Comaneci and the USA women's gymnastics team, respectively, while the Distinguished Service Award was shared by James J. Elek, a prominent successful realtor from Woodbridge, NJ and Dr. Tibor Sipos, a research scientist responsible for the development of drugs and drug delivery systems.

One of the most attractive ways to express and show to the world the cultural and historical heritage of an ethnic group is the all-day festivities called Hungarian Festival (Image 5.), traditionally held on the first Saturday in June. Vendors line up the Somerset Street mall area with Hungarian products, folk art & crafts, food and pastries. Hungarian language and music can be heard all over the place, folk dancing and fencing demonstrations on the street draw crowds of people, „rain or shine” as the website says. Grandparents show their grandkids part of their past cultural identity, which is so hard to maintain from generation to generation. Tribute and salute to the educators in Sunday schools, to priests and ministers in churches, to musicians and dancers who keep traditions alive and pass the heritage to the younger generations. I volunteered at the 33rd Annual Hungarian Festival on June 7, 2008 to sell second-hand books and LPs on behalf of the Hungarian Heritage Center (Image 6.).

## **4. How to become involved**

I felt it especially important to find local organizations and communities, to meet with as many people as possible in order to share our cultural experiences and values. I highly recommend for future grantees to find out what's available on campus, in town, and match your interest with the local opportunities, whether you prefer sports, music, church, or something else: in two words – get involved. I was fortunate



enough to find a Catholic church with a Sunday mass in Hungarian nearby, and could join the church choir almost immediately. Not only did it give me a sense of belonging, but I was able to enjoy one of my hobbies: that is singing. I was invited to friends' homes several times to enjoy dinner or other celebrations like Thanksgiving, or Easter egg hunting.

## 5. Along Route 66 – sort of...

I took the opportunity to extend my visa with a 30-day grace period and planned – among other things – a two-week trip to the South-West mainly to visit National and State Parks. Driving nearly 5,000 miles (c. 8,800 kms) gave me and my brother a chance to experience the cultural and natural diversity of the North American continent, our trip taking us from the deserts of New Mexico to the snow-capped mountains of Nevada, and from the canyons of Arizona to the Pacific coast of California. We even crossed the famous, but now outdated Route 66 at one point, and stopped at the memorial site to record the moment and to prove that we were there (Image 7).

## 6. Acknowledgements

Last, but not least I'd like to thank first of all the staff members of the Hungarian-American Fulbright Commission in Budapest Dr. Huba Brückner, Krisztina Dietz and Csanád Nagypál for making the original grant and the two-month extension possible for me, and making all the administrative and financial arrangements as smooth and timely as possible; the staff members of the Council for International Exchange of Scholars responsible for Hungarian grantees in Washington, DC Muriel Joffe and Kevin Orchison for giving assistance in tax matters and in the extension process; and finally members of the

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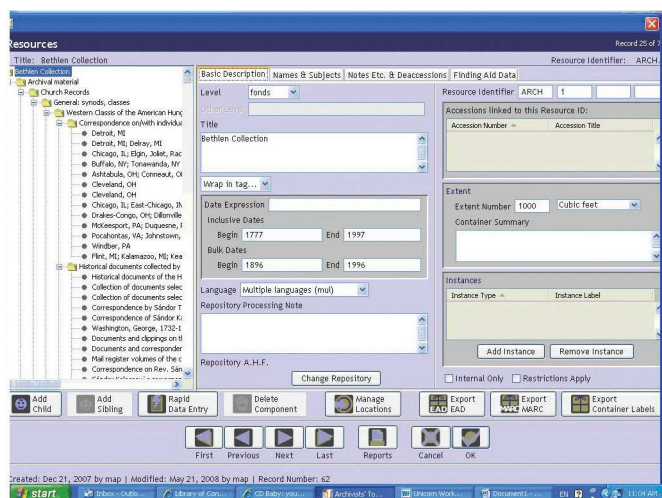
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### Route 66 Memorial



### Hálaadástól Adventig



### Archivists' Toolkit (Screen.jpg)





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